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Israel Center Honors Spies Whose Names Were as Secret as Their Missions

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TEL AVIV, Aug. 24 — Some of them were killed by double agents; others were hanged in the central squares of Damascus or Baghdad, and still others died years ago in circumstances so shrouded in mystery that even today no one will speak about them.

What they all had in common was that they were Israeli spies, secret agents or intelligence analysts who lived and died in anonymity. No longer.

Today, all 360 of their names have been carved into the walls of a memorial center in north Tel Aviv that honors the fallen members of Israel's intelligence agencies, the one branch of the Israeli security forces that has never had a monument.

An Interesting List

The site was recently opened to the public, and for anyone interested in espionage the list of names is fascinating reading. The names of some people never before exposed as intelligence officers are on the wall. The curators of the memorial, former intelligence officers themselves, are tight-lipped about the personal histories of many of the names.

But with a little research in the dozens of books about the Israeli secret services, it is possible to put together the names with some of the more captivating spy stories of the postwar era.

The story behind the Center for Special Studies in the Memory of the Fallen of Israel's Intelligence Community, as the memorial is called, began several years ago when the relatives of the dead intelligence agents got together and decided to build a monument to their loved ones, a place to which they could bring their children and at least lay a wreath once a year.

"Everybody had some kind of memorial — the signal corps, the artillery corps — we had nothing," said Meir Amit, who was the head of the Mossad, Israel's ultrasecretive foreign intelligence arm, from 1963 to 1968. He is chairman of the center.

'A Living Memorial'

"The families came to us and said, 'Look, not only during their lives did no one know what they did, not even their children and certainly not their neighbors, but now, even when they are dead, no one knows,'" Mr. Amit said. "We gave in to their demands, but we took over the project. We didn't want a pile of cement. We wanted a living memorial."

Mr. Amit and his intelligence colleagues, drawing on their extensive global contacts, gathered \$700,000 from Israelis and \$1.3 million from Jews abroad, who, for a \$50,000 donation, could become "honorary members of the intelligence community."

From the beginning, it was decided by the center's board that the memorial would honor fallen members of all three intelligence services in Israel: the Mossad, Israel's equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency, which en-

gages in foreign operations; the Shin Bet, Israel's Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Military Intelligence.

Although the name of Brig. Gen. Ehud Barak, the chief of Military Intelligence, is public, the heads of Shin Bet and Mossad, whose chief is known as "No. 1," are secret.

The center's complex is already being hailed as one of the most tastefully appointed and innovatively designed memorials in Israel. Built of huge, angular sandstone blocks, the core of the memorial consists of a maze broken into five different alcoves, each representing a period in the history of Israel's intelligence operations. The names of the agents who died during each period are engraved on the stone walls.

Why It's a Maze

"The idea of the labyrinthine maze," said Yeshayahu Daliot, a veteran of the Israeli security establishment and the director of the center, "was to create an impression of interminable search, of changing direction, of complexity and infinity, which is what intelligence-gathering is all about."

Showing a visitor through the maze, Mr. Amit, the former Mossad "No. 1," pointed out name after name of friends and colleagues, some of whom he had sent on their missions.

"People always are asking me whether I read John Le Carre's spy novels," Mr. Amit said. "I always tell them no. Reality was much more interesting for me and went far beyond whatever anyone could develop in a novel."

One of the most interesting names listed here is in the second alcove, covering 1949 to 1957. It is Jacob Bokai, the first agent to die after the nation of Israel was established.

A Syrian-born Jew, Mr. Bokai was assigned by Israeli intelligence to enter Jordan with a stream of Palestinian refugees on May 4, 1949. He carried the forged identity card of "Najib Ibrahim Hamuda" and was prepared for his mission by being put into a prison with Arab captives, where he was occasionally beaten by his Jewish guards.

Jew Given Moslem Burial

But the Jordanians somehow suspected him and arrested him as soon as he crossed into their territory. Despite hours of interrogation, the Jordanians never discovered that he was an Israeli, said Mr. Amit. Mr. Bokai was executed on Aug. 3, 1949, for spying and was given a Moslem burial as "Mr. Hamuda."

Before he was hanged, Mr. Bokai managed to send some letters back to his superiors affirming, "I did not commit treason," Mr. Amit said.

In the same section are the names of two who died on Jan. 22, 1952 — Shalom Salah Shalom and Joseph Basri. They were Israeli agents in Baghdad helping Iraqi Jews to arm themselves against Arab rioters and to escape from the country, Mr. Amit said. They were caught by the Iraqi security services and hanged side by side in Baghdad's central square.

The next alcove, 1957 to 1968, contains the name of probably the most famous of Israel's secret agents, Eli Cohen, known as "Our Man in Damascus." Mr. Amit was his boss. Mr. Cohen was infiltrated into Syria under the identity of "Kamil Amin Taabes," supposedly a Syrian émigré returning home from Argentina after having amassed a fortune.

He penetrated the top echelons of the Syrian Government and Army, throwing lavish parties and dispensing expensive gifts. He was so effective at ingratiating himself with the Syrian elite that he was considered as a possible candidate for Defense Minister.

But he was caught after the Soviet Union shipped Syria sophisticated homing equipment, which led the Syrian secret service to Mr. Cohen's apartment as he was making his daily transmission to Mossad headquarters. He was hanged in a Damascus square on May 15, 1965, for spying.

A Few Surprises on the Wall

Also in the second alcove is Shalom Dani, who died of natural causes on May 21, 1963. A painter, Mr. Dani was the unrivaled master forger for Israeli intelligence, according to a former Mossad chief, Isser Harel. Mr. Dani traveled around the world with his brushes and paints and could make passports, driver's licenses or other identity cards on the fly in any language. Working in Buenos Aires in 1960, he forged all of the documents used by the Israeli Mossad team that captured Adolf Eichmann.

Mr. Amit said there were still a few

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names, some of them foreigners, who had died in the service of Israeli intelligence on operations so secret that they could not be listed. Still, there are a few surprises on the wall. One is Yacov Bar Siman-Tov, who was gunned down as he walked out of his Paris home on April 3, 1982. He had been stationed as a diplomat at Israel's Paris Embassy and had never before been confirmed as an intelligence agent.

One of the most colorful people on the list, according to Mr. Dallot, was Zeev Biber Bar Levi, who died of cancer last February. Known to everyone as "The Jordanian," Mr. Biber was the chief military intelligence expert on King Hussein.

"They used to say of Colonel Biber that he knew what King Hussein was thinking before King Hussein did," Mr. Sailot said. "Once during the Six Day War, Biber received a radio intercept in which a Jordanian artillery officer

was complaining that he had lost his ammunition. Biber shouted, 'You idiot, it's in such and such a place!' He knew where all the Jordanian ammunition was."

After visitors have walked through the maze, they can go to a grass outdoor amphitheater or attend talks in the lecture hall. There is also a library and computer rooms that will be hooked up eventually to the Mossad and Shin Bet intelligence libraries for limited information retrieval.

That is not all that remains unfinished. There is one alcove with a blank wall.

"We have a spare court," Mr. Amit said.

"You mean," a visitor began, "in case someone else—"

"No," the former Mossad chief said, cutting his guest off, "not in case. We know we are going to need it, unfortunately."